

The Rural Survey

By John Baxter Howes

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The Rural Survey

Suggestions for Pastors and Leaders
in Rural and Small Town Churches

Prepared by

John Baxter Howes

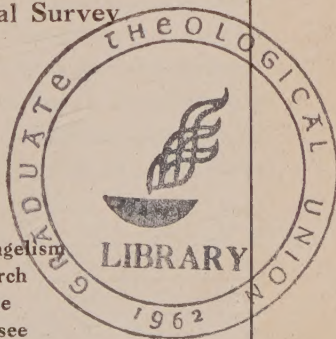
to assist in the

All-Important Annual Survey

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RELIGIOUS CENSUS		Date Taken		Initials of Worker	
Family Name		Home Address			Phone
First Names	Approx. Age	Baptized?	Member of *		If not a member of any church, what preference?
			Church School	Church	
Father					
Mother					
Children					
Others living in home					

*Write name of place where membership is held.

(Over)

This page contains a reduced facsimile of the two sides of a survey card (actual size, 4x6 inches) provided by the General Board of Education, 810 Broadway, Nashville 2, Tenn. This card should be ordered directly from the Board of Education, whereas the card on page 16 should be ordered from TIDINGS.

Occupation of head of family_____

Working hours_____ Own or rent home?_____

Number of years lived in this community_____

How far are you from nearest Methodist Church?_____

How far are you from any other church?_____ What church?_____

What means of conveyance have you?_____

Do your youth attend Sunday evening youth meeting?_____

Do your children attend week-day meetings for children?_____

Remarks_____

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THE RURAL SURVEY

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

1. To Discover the People for Whom the Church Is Responsible

There are about 60,000,000 people in this country who do not belong to any church. Some of these are in every community. Herein lies a great evangelistic opportunity. An even greater responsibility for Methodism are the 300,000 Methodists whose whereabouts are unknown. Almost every community has some of these. It is certain that we must know where the people are before we can win them for Christ and the Church. New members can be obtained for any church by the simple method of making a survey and carefully following it with visitation.

In making one survey a family consisting of the father, mother, and five children was discovered. When it was reported, neither the pastor nor the superintendent of the church school knew of them, although they had been living for more than a year in sight of the church and just across the creek from the farm of the superintendent. The Sunday following the survey call the mother and the five children were at Sunday School. Examples like this are being constantly discovered.

The unintentional ignoring of people is often felt to be a deliberate slight, when it is only a tragic unawareness of them. At times relocated church people are found inactive simply because timidity made it difficult for them to begin attending a new church. A case of this kind was found where a family, members of the church and active in attendance in one community, moved to

another place and for four years had been considered uninterested in the church because they had never attended. The information obtained in the survey disclosed the previous interest and led to a resumption of religious activity in the new church.

The country church can often be more forbidding than the town and city church. The relatively few people may belong to two or three families and constitute a seemingly complete social group which others hesitate to try to enter.

The actual number of people unreached in a community may well present a real challenge to the people of the church. The results of one survey were being shared with the leaders of a small country church. The map of the community, showing the outline of the territory with all the homes included, was displayed and they were asked to guess the number of people involved. One of the church leaders, long resident in the community and engaged as road supervisor of the township, guessed the population to be 130. Other guesses were proportionately low. The actual population was 233. The survey further showed that there were 21 resident members of that little Methodist church and 16 people in that area who belonged to Methodist churches in other communities. Moreover, it was significantly discovered that 48 adults, 23 young people, and 29 children, not members of any church, indicated they would join The Methodist Church if they ever joined any church at all. This was a powerful challenge to the church leaders to make their church program more effective and to make the outreach of the church greater.

2. To Secure Information About the People

Although the survey is primarily religious, some information about the people and their manner of living is essential in planning for the work of the church. In a

village with 21 homes the church had been closed for five years. A survey was made with a plan to reopen the church. Among other things it was discovered that the 21 heads of families went to 19 different places to work. This would be of importance in that it would show how difficult it would be to get the people to come together to form a religious unit. Likewise the matter of home ownership will reflect the economic situation and also the likelihood of people moving. The type of occupation is significant. Farmers may not be expected to move; but industrial workers are much more likely to do so. If a large percentage of the people work in the same industry, the church will feel an economic fluctuation more quickly than if there are diverse occupations.

3. To Discover Community Needs

The time is past when we can be satisfied to carry on in a traditional style without regard for the various factors that help to create special needs in the community. A circuit pastor expressed regret that in one of his four churches he was unable to have a Methodist Youth Fellowship. He said there were not enough young people in the village to effect an adequate organization. A survey showed that 21 young people were available. The organization was formed and became one of the best on the charge. This same need for proper information can be applied to any phase of the work of the church. The size and type of facilities can best be decided on the basis of the potential needs of the community.

4. To Discover Unchurched Areas

The survey is the only accurate means of determining what areas need service and which may not. For years ministers and laymen had driven through a certain built-up section near a city limits. It was lightly assumed that all the people were being cared for spiritually. A survey

showed that of 271 people only 54 were attending services of any sort anywhere. An outpost established by the nearest Methodist church immediately had attendances from 60 to 110. A church school was started, and a Woman's Society of Christian Service and a Methodist Youth Fellowship were organized.

During a simultaneous revival the matter of unchurched areas was being discussed. One of the pastors mentioned a community where there had been a Methodist church in the past but said that the people in the village were all Roman Catholic now. A survey showed only two Roman Catholics in a population of 72 people. The others were trying to carry on a Sunday school in a little schoolhouse, holding on to the memories of the time when a Methodist pastor had served them. Within two years six closed churches had been reopened and three new ones started in one Annual Conference. There is no reason to doubt that this could be duplicated throughout the entire Methodist Church.

II. PREPARATION FOR THE SURVEY

1. Supplies Needed

A. SURVEY CARDS

On the front of the card will be recorded address, telephone number, names, dates of birth, relation to church school and church, whether baptized, church preference if non-member. The back of the card has space for number of years in community, occupation, working hours, owner or renter, distances from churches, and means of conveyance. Many other questions might be asked but it is helpful to make the questioning as brief as possible. The survey card illustrated on page two is printed by the General Board of Education and can be purchased from its Nashville office, as indicated thereon.

B. THREE SOFT-LEADED PENCILS OR GOOD MECHANICAL PENCIL

Obtaining the information should be as unobtrusive as possible. Therefore it is well that the surveyor be equipped to do it without any hesitancy or difficulty.

C. TRACTS TO LEAVE IN THE HOME

The various Boards of The Methodist Church publish helpful pamphlets and tracts that should be in the hands of the people. Write to the General Board of Evangelism for a list of the tracts that are available. One left in each home will enhance the value of the survey call.

D. POCKET NEW TESTAMENT

In order to be ready for any spiritual service that may present itself while making the call it is naturally essential to have a New Testament available.

2. *Preparation of a Map of the Area*

A map of the territory to be covered in the survey should be included, showing each house to be visited. This can be drawn from an existing map or may simply be a rough sketch made by someone familiar with the community.

3. *Publicity*

It will be most helpful to publicize the survey in advance. This will result in a sense of expectancy and ready co-operation on the part of the people.

III. PROCEDURE OF THE SURVEY

1. *The Surveyors*

A. GROUP

If considered expedient, the survey may be made quickly by enough workers to complete the task in

one afternoon. This will call for the training of a large number of lay workers or pastors brought together. This method will be simply a fact-gathering process and will give little opportunity for the personal touch so needed if we are to attract people to the ministry of the church. However, it does work for a good purpose when the information is needed immediately. In a very short time a large mass of material can be brought together for study.

Another advantage lies in the training it gives the workers who participate. Those who go from door to door doing this work must be most carefully trained if the data is to be accurate. The experience lays fine ground work for those who would do visiting later. The technique of a proper approach and an orderly manner of drawing out the person being interviewed is necessary in any sort of call. Ministers, even though skilled and experienced in pastoral visitation, will find themselves helped by such training.

B. INDIVIDUAL

Unless there is need for the survey to be made very quickly, it is best for the pastor to do it. It will be helpful for a layman to accompany him. In some cases a neighboring pastor may work with him. In any case it is a good thing for the local pastor to make each call personally. In the first place it gives him a systematic visitation of every home in his parish—a thing pastors so frequently fail to get done. He will have a better understanding of the information than he can possibly have if it is brought to him on cards. He will know what every home in his parish is like. He will know something about how his people live. This type of survey need not be hurried.

2. The Making of the Call

The visitor (with his cards in his pocket), if not known to the person who answers his knock, should first give his

name and the church he represents. If a Methodist minister, he should say so. This will get him in the house in almost every case. If it does not, he may say, "I would like to come in a moment." The call can be much more satisfactory if the visitor is in the house and seated. The information can be secured through a crack in the door, but such a call will do nothing more than get information. An explanation of the purpose of the survey should be made.

Never call it a survey. There are so many being made just now that it will be as well not to let the people feel they are simply being surveyed again. I often say, "We are here to talk with you about Christ and the Church. We would like to get your names and relation to the church while we are here." I explain how necessary it is that the pastor know about the people in his community. Give a survey card to the host or hostess. It gives them a sense of confidence.

In only two cases have I had people refuse to give me the needed information. One lady refused because both of us who were making the visit were strangers to her. Before I left I discovered that her husband was a victim of a mine accident and she was afraid we were investigators from a compensation company. In the other instance, a young man refused to answer questions but finally told me he had a medical discharge from the armed forces and I learned later that his was a mental difficulty.

If success is to be had, the interviewer must acquire some skill and use much tact. Each question should be a leading question if there seems to be any hesitancy on the part of the person being questioned. In the matter of church membership much care must be used. In evangelical churches so little emphasis has been placed on preparation for church membership, and even on the admission ritual itself, that often people are not certain whether they ever actually joined the Church. Often it takes much probing to determine whether non-members

have been baptized. Close every call with Bible reading and prayer.

IV. TABULATION OF THE INFORMATION

1. The Tabulation Sheet

As important as the gathering of the information is the tabulation of the results. Although a relatively simple matter, there are several important considerations. The material must be faithfully and accurately arranged, if it is to be dependable. There is also the importance of having the complete survey for the area to be studied. If it should prove impossible to have data for every home at the time when it must be compiled, it will prove much more scientific to consider a section of the community for which the data is complete. In this case the consideration would be of percentages rather than total figures.

For tabulating, use a blank with three general divisions: members of local churches, members of churches in other communities, and denominational preferences. These are used as vertical divisions. Horizontal lines can separate the several denominations or religious faiths. The vertical divisions will each be separated into four parts to indicate adult, young adult, young people, and children. The age groups used by the General Board of Education are used here. The usual variations for the young adults will be followed in order to give as true a picture as possible. Every person on the cards will be represented in this diagram. The tabulation should be done so accurately that the figures will balance vertically and horizontally. This will give a true picture of the religious situation of the community. Another section is added for church school attendance, but this will not be in the balanced totals. This likewise should be separated into four age divisions.

The occupational distribution can simply be listed in a column with the name opposite the number involved.

Order should be observed here. Either make the list alphabetical or head the list with the most frequently occurring occupation, followed by the next highest, etc.

The length of residence can be stated in averages but it will be best to show the number of families for several spans of time; for instance, show the number for one year, the number for five years, the number for ten years, and then the number for more than twenty years. This would give an indication of the influence of the church in the community upon the children and young people.

The number of tenants and home owners can be stated in two figures.

The distances from church should be shown in the same type of column as the length of residence. It is quite important in planning a yearly program to know how accessible the church is.

2. The Map

The construction of an accurate map is the completion of a good survey. It must be attractively done so it can be shown with pride by the pastor and people. It **MUST** be accurate. If it is not, the discrepancies will detract from the interest in the information shown on it, and its purpose is to give certain information. In many instances there can be found in the community someone gifted or trained in drafting who will construct the map. Although this would be a most fortunate circumstance, it is not necessary. Anyone with a sense of proportion can make an acceptable and usable map.

The best general source for maps is the State Department of Highways in each state. Visit or write the main office at the state capitol. In states that are divided into townships, it will be best to obtain township maps. Usually large county maps are available at 50 cents each and township maps at 25 cents each. The Geological Survey, Department of Interior, Washington, D. C., has prepared

excellent maps. These are not made on a township or county basis but have the territory arbitrarily divided into quadrangles. In order to know what quadrangle you need, it will be necessary to send for a map of your state on which the quadrangle lines will be superimposed. Each quadrangle is named for one of the towns located therein. The proper map is then ordered by state and quadrangle name. The advantage of these maps lies in the fact that every house is located on the map except in the case of city or larger town situations. Some of the surveys were made several years ago, and consequently are not completely accurate in portraying roads and houses, but they are adaptable. These quadrangle maps cost only 20 cents each. Order from Geological Survey, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. They may be obtained also from the office supply and stationary houses in large centers.

Some towns have very good maps made to a large scale. Often public utility companies have maps made to a large scale. In the case of some industrial towns, particularly mining towns, the company office can furnish an excellent map. These usually show the building lots laid off and numbered.

A few pen points of varied widths will be necessary if contrasting lines are to be shown. These can be obtained from any office supply dealer. Waterproof drawing ink will be needed. It is heavier and thus better adapted for drawing and will be durable. A good ruler and a T-square will complete the necessary equipment for map making. If the map is to be carried from place to place, it will be found advantageous to put it on sign cloth. This material is waterproof and can be rolled. It has the additional advantage that it can be bought by the yard and consequently can be any desired size.

The distances between houses in the open country can be obtained by driving along the road and recording the

distances in tenths of miles. Then when the scale for the map to be drawn is established, the houses can be placed on to scale. In the case of houses close together, as in villages or towns, find the number of houses in each one-tenth mile and then divide them in that space as nearly proportionate as is possible. Use the heavy pen point for main highways and other points for lesser roads. For the houses cut one-fourth inch squares of colored art paper, using a different color for each denomination. In the case of a divided home in which the husband belongs to one church and the wife to another, use both colors overlapping one with the other. Number each house on the map, placing the corresponding numbers on the survey cards. Do not write the names of the people on the map. One move would put your map out of date. With numbers on the map, the card can be simply and easily changed, giving the new family the old number as it appears on the map. In case a new house is built it can be given a new number.

V. USE OF THE INFORMATION

1. Sharing Service

This material can be best presented when it is copied for distribution to the people. It should always be presented to an existing congregation in a "sharing service." It will be a great challenge to lay people to realize the tremendous needs and possibilities that exist for their church. The map showing the boundaries of the area under study and with all the homes and public and service institutions clearly marked should be on display. The reasons for having made the survey should then be fully stated. The audience can be brought to real interest in the results if you ask for guesses on the population of the area and other figures such as distance and number of homes.

After the figures have been given, discussion of the

FRIENDLY COMMUNITY STUDY

Young Married Couple _____
 Not at Home _____
 Vacant House _____
 Declined Information _____

Address _____

Family Name _____

Given Name	Member What Church (Where if out of city)	Local Church Preference	Where Attend Sunday School
Mr. _____	_____	_____	_____
Mrs. _____ Age _____	_____	_____	_____
Children _____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
Others _____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Callers _____ Write additional information on other side.

This is the Survey Card prepared by Dr. Guy H. Black and so successfully used for years by churches for quick surveys ahead of visitation evangelism campaigns. Its size is 3x5, it is on heavy, three-ply cardboard, and is obtainable from TIDINGS, 35c per 100, postpaid.

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